**Conclusion: The BBC and the election: Boris, Brexit and Corbyn**

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The decisive victory for the Conservatives at the 2019 general election had three core explanations. First, the election of Boris Johnson as party leader instantly improved the Conservatives’ prospects. Second and strongly related, decisiveness on Brexit delivered seats for the party in places previously unimaginable, as Labour’s so-called ‘red wall’ of previously solid northern, midland and north Wales seats tumbled apace. Third, Labour’s inability to ditch a leader who some within the party and most beyond viewed as unelectable presented the prospect of victory to any semi-competent Conservative campaign.

**The ‘Boris Bounce’**

The Conservatives ‘Get Brexit Done’ slogan was a thing of genius for a public exasperated by three-and-a-half years of wrangling since June 2016. Whatever its glibness, the appeal to bring an end to seemingly interminable political turmoil resonated with an aggravated electorate. Johnson was chosen as leader by his party in the summer of 2019 on the grounds he was a winner with charisma – the antithesis of his predecessor. Two wins in London mayoral contests indicated his status as an electoral asset and, even allowing for the unusual circumstances of the 2019 contest, his achievement in securing an 80-seat majority was impressive. No government holding office for so long had ever put on seats at an election. Johnson assisted the Conservative ‘feel-good’ factor. Most (72%) said they were voting positively in favour of their party, its leader and policies than negatively (23%) against what the ‘other side’ were offering (Ashcroft: 2020: 10).

Johnson recognised the need for clarity on the delivery of Brexit. As James Dennison’s contribution has shown, the message from the 2019 European Parliament elections, at the denouement of Theresa May’s unfortunate leadership of the Conservatives, could hardly have been starker. Nigel Farage’s Brexit Party swept to victory with 30.5% of the vote, almost 11% more than the second placed Liberal Democrats, winning 29 seats in a parliament of which it wanted no part. Significantly, the Brexit Party won the most seats in every constituency in England and Wales except London and obtained the support of 75% of Leave identifiers – compared to only 9% backing the Conservatives (Fieldhouse et al, 2020). The Conservatives’ overall performance, obtaining only 8.8% of the UK vote, was the party’s worst in any national election, ever. With the Brexit Party threatening to become the major force of Leave – the Conservatives’ natural territory, there were obvious risks for the governing party. Whilst European elections had long been notoriously unrepresentative of what happened at a subsequent general election, failure to resolve the Brexit issue posed obvious danger for the Conservatives, even allowing for the inadequacies of Corbyn’s Labour.

With Theresa May departing as Prime Minister after the European election debacle, Boris Johnson looked to break the Brexit deadlock in the Autumn. He was determined to end the parliamentary – ‘no Brexit option is acceptable’ – stalemate. The first move was to quickly reach an arrangement with the Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, to keep the border in Ireland seamless. This involved Johnson unceremoniously dumping the Conservatives’ parliamentary allies, the DUP, who Johnson had wooed only the previous year but now found surplus to requirements. The short-term difficulty was that the DUP, fearing that Johnson’s Brexit marginalised Northern Ireland’s place in the UK by aligning it uniquely close to the EU, now joined the vast ranks of MPs prepared to vote against Brexit in the Commons, accentuating the stalemate. To break the impasse, a winter election became inevitable.

**Brexit**

‘Getting Brexit Done’ meant Getting Leave Voters for the Conservatives. Johnson’s emphasis upon Brexit delivery staunched the flow of Leave votes to the Brexit Party and marginalised Farage. The huge lead for the Conservatives among 2016 Leave voters – more than four times as likely to vote for Boris Johnson’s party compared to Jeremy Corbyn’s – made an enormous contribution to their 2019 triumph. Labour’s lead among 2016 Remain voters was substantial, but this section of the electorate was less than two-and-a-half as likely to favour Corbyn’s party over the Conservatives (Ashcroft 2020). In short, the Conservatives had a much bigger lead in a slightly bigger pool of voters. A more modest lead for Labour among a minority of 2016 voters was not going to suffice.

Labour were of course hampered in that there were more parties fishing in the Remain waters but the party’s failure to achieve even an overall majority of Remain voters (47%) was a damning indictment of the party’s obfuscations (Ashcroft 2020). Only just over half (52%) of those who voted Leave in 2016 and Labour in 2017 stayed Labour in 2019, whereas the Conservatives retained 92% of their 2017 voters who had opted for Leave in 2016 (YouGov 2019). Labour also struggled to hold the votes of those on the other side of the Brexit divide, 16% of its Remain voters deserting the party between the two subsequent elections. (Kellner 2019).

The regular portrayal of ‘Labour Leave’ seats, feeling betrayed by Labour, gravitating towards a Remain position needs some nuance. That type of Labour voter was most certainly present, particularly in the constituencies which fell to the Conservatives in 2019 (the Conservatives gained 28 seats with a Leave vote of more than 60%) but within those seats Labour voters were more likely to have voted Remain than did Conservative voters. Nonetheless, as John Curtice noted in this volume, there were particularly large swings from Labour to the Conservatives in strongly Leave voting seats, those where more than 60% opted in 2016 to quit the EU. There was an average 9.3% swing from Labour to Conservative in such Labour-held seats and 7.5% in Conservative-held constituencies. These were swings way above the average GB-wide Labour to Conservative swing of 4.7 points. Such extensively Leave seats were not rare either, amounting to 26% of the ones Labour was trying (often vainly) to defend and 29% of those the Conservatives were (comfortably) holding. Large parts of the electoral map turned blue and the existing blue deepened. Moreover, the Brexit damage for Labour in Leave seats was not confined to England. As Jonathan Bradbury observed, all of Labour’s six losses in Wales came in pro-Brexit constituencies.

Labour’s obfuscations and implausibility on Brexit made it impossible for the party to seize the initiative on the issue. The Conservatives were equally divided in some respects – a Cabinet split, a parliamentary party that was pro-EU and a membership pro-Brexit. Those divisions were, eventually, cast asunder by a new leader with a decisive policy of at least achieving EU withdrawal, even if the post-EU trading terms were anything but apparent. Action first, details later, played well with a bored and frustrated electorate. Meanwhile Labour, having opposed a variety of options in Parliament, had developed a policy which stretched credulity. The party would miraculously negotiate a better withdrawal deal with the EU and put this to the people in a second referendum. Voters would be offered a choice between a ‘credible Leave’ option versus Remain. The obvious question begged was whether Labour would campaign against the decent Leave deal it had just negotiated. Given the pro-Remain sentiments of the bulk of Labour MPs and members, that seemed likely, so the scenario would be a referendum with the leadership likely to oppose the fruits of its negotiating efforts.

Corbyn and his supporters might complain legitimately that the problem for Labour on Brexit was created internally by those in the centre and on the right of the party, whose anti-Brexit sentiments prevented acceptance of the 2016 verdict. Corbyn might personally have accepted the referendum result without much demur. Given his status as a lifelong EU-sceptic, Corbyn’s assertion that he voted Remain had always been an eyebrow-raiser. In the aftermath of the result, he called for Article 50 to be triggered immediately, to commence the withdrawal process. Left to his own devices, there seems little doubt that Corbyn would have readily acquiesced in the people’s verdict and backed a ‘Lexit’ based upon workers’ rights and socialism within an independent UK. Given his commitment to internal Labour democracy, however, Corbyn could not simply ignore the many party voices wanting a second referendum. When Keir Starmer added to the text of his pre-circulated party conference address in Liverpool in 2018, to call for a second referendum in which ‘nobody is ruling out Remain as an option’, he won a standing ovation from many of those assembled. Labour’s course was effectively set: a slow retreat from acceptance of the Leave vote. The constructive ambiguities associated with that retreat were to prove expensive as Labour’s ‘red wall’ of pro-Brexit seats fell in big numbers to the Conservatives in 2019. Blyth Valley, Leigh, Sedgefield and Workington had been Labour-held for more than 80 years. Whatever the electoral damage wrought by the creep from Brexit, Starmer’s alignment with much of his party was politically rewarded, soon to become party leader.

**The Corbyn Factor**

According to Lord Ashcroft’s (2020: 7) survey of more than 10,000 voters, Jeremy’s Corbyn’s status as ‘not an appealing leader’ was an even bigger explanation (just) of the election result than Brexit. The unappealing prospect of a Corbyn-led Labour government made a comfortable election victory possible for any Conservative leader capable of running a competent campaign. More than half of Labour defectors gave not wanting Corbyn as Prime Minister as their primary reason for desertion (Ashcroft 2020: 8).

The 2019 election outcome thus truly exposed the haplessness of Theresa May’s 2017 campaign and it is plausible, if obviously speculative, to contend that her continuation as Conservative leader might have again denied her party an overall majority. May’s resignation on 7 June 2019, after the nadir of the European elections, marked the beginning of the end for Corbyn. Her inability to deliver for the Conservatives had succeeded in partially masking Corbyn’s unpopularity. As Sam Power, Tim Bale and Paul Webb noted in their contribution, remarkably, the ratings gap between May and Corbyn even disappeared entirely for a short time. Johnson’s elevation left the Labour leader far more exposed. Whilst aspects of Corbynism remained popular, such as state ownership of the railways, few saw the Labour leader as a credible future Prime Minister. As David Denver highlighted in the opening results section, Corbyn’s net rating for the first half of the election year was abysmal, at -57 but this dreadful score perhaps looked a little less hideous when the -37 average for Mrs May was considered. Come Autumn and the advent of Johnson’s premiership, Corbyn fell to a -60 negative rating, the worst in British political history. Whilst Johnson’s honeymoon period was hardly marked by polling glories – he pursued the election campaign with a -20 negative rating, it was at least a sizeable improvement upon May. Corbyn’s figure remained worse than that endured by May, at -44. Put simply, Corbyn was the most unpopular leader of a major party ever. The fears of swathes of Labour’s parliamentary party that Corbyn was unelectable proved entirely justified. Most stayed put nonetheless to await their fate, which in most cases was at least a happier one than those who defected to the short-lived Change UK. As James Dennison showed, this was little more than an ill-conceived, leaking holding company for a disparate and increasingly desperate assortment of MPs, all decisively rejected at the election.

Corbyn was up against it, given the damning press verdicts upon him, which as Dominic Wring and Stephen Ward note, were as partisan as anything previously experienced in what is often brutal election coverage. As those two contributors observe, Labour more broadly had a tough task in selling Corbyn’s message. Only the *Daily Mirror* offered the party wholehearted support, with the Conservatives backed by 72% of the press, based upon circulation, compared to Labour’s 13%. This begs the age-old question of whether newspapers mainly lead or reflect public opinion. There is also the issue of whether newspapers still matter. The parties seem to think so. Justin Fisher’s analysis of campaign expenditure indicated that they spent slightly more on print than digital advertising, with the big two parties, according to the analysis of Katharine Dommett and Mehmet Emin Bakir, spending similar amounts on Facebook and Google advertising. As Fisher notes, Facebook’s ‘incubation period’ for adverts, to allow checking, diminished its capacity for rapid rebuttal. He also notes how Corbyn and Labour were also confronted by the much bigger financial firepower provided for the Conservatives, which no election expenditure regulatory framework can entirely ameliorate or equalise. During the campaign, the Conservatives raised over £19 million; Labour £5.4 million.

Corbyn’s aspiration was to turn Labour into a transformative social movement. Yet many of its members and certainly the outriders on the left, in Momentum, were incapable of connecting with the population beyond the 500,000 strong party membership, to deliver any such prospect (Fielding 2019). Far from developing a movement-based alternative, factionalism and an inability to operate as a credible potential alternative government – the key task of opposition – meant that Labour struggled to function as a political party. Rather than building a strong movement, Labour struggled to retain its supporters between elections far more than the Conservatives. Whilst northern cities, remained loyal to Labour, this effectively meant the party was ‘wasting’ many more votes than the Conservatives in piling up huge majorities. Exit the cities for the towns and suburbs and it was soon possible to leave ‘Labourland’.

Whilst there were other issues of more pervasive salience, Corbyn’s apparent incapacity to root out anti-Semitism bedevilled his leadership, as shown by Eunice Goes. It demonstrated an inability to decisively address awkward issues requiring authoritative action. To Brexit and anti-Semitism might be added Scotland, where Scottish Labour and the Corbyn-McDonnell London Labour leadership were not always at ease. In Scotland, Labour struggled to locate itself on a political axis shaped by nationalism versus unionism. This was perhaps understandable and was a problem which preceded Corbyn. However, the difficulties appeared to be exacerbated when the Shadow Chancellor, John McDonnell, astonished Labour’s Scottish leader, Richard Leonard, when he announced, in August 2019, that Labour should allow a second independence referendum if MSPs voted for one (*The Guardian*, 6 August 2019). McDonnell’s concession was in direct contravention of Labour Party policy. Although Labour is obviously ‘small u’ unionist, it is not defined by it to anywhere near the extent of the Conservatives. The result was that the party of nationalism, the SNP, won 48 of the 59 seats and the party of unionism, the Conservatives, came second, albeit distantly and with losses, with six. Labour managed to hold a solitary seat. Nine years previously, the party held 41.

The extent of Labour’s problems under Corbyn was highlighted by Lord Ashcroft’s (2020) finding that 85% of voters said they would have voted the same way had Brexit not been an issue. Most Leave voters had already decided they disliked the Labour leader anyway (Sandvoss, 2019). That had been priced in ever since the 2017 contest. Of course, it might be observed that the 15% who might have changed their vote *sans* Brexit was the difference between election victory and defeat. Believers in the Corbyn project might argue that, without Brexit as the dominant election issue, Labour would have at least gone close. Such a narrative might also point to Labour’s better-than-expected performance at the 2017 election, which deprived the Conservatives of a majority. Yet these arguments appear thin given how Labour trailed the Conservatives by 55 seats in 2017 despite the haplessness of Theresa May’s campaign.

As Eunice Goes has highlighted, Labour’s 2019 campaign pledged even more money than the 2017 offering. The ‘Advent calendar’ approach unveiled expensive spending pledges daily, at a time when Labour’s capacity for fiscal responsibility remained unproven amongst the electorate. Labour’s extensive 107-page manifesto contained expensive spending pledges on the majority of the first 80 pages, before it turned to constitutional issues, Brexit and internationalism (Labour Party, 2019). Yet the party began the campaign with only 15% of voters thinking its spending plans affordable (Smith, 2019). The manifesto was more explicitly socialist than the 2017 version. In addition to increased taxation of individual high earners, the plans indicated that the UK would raise more in corporation tax than any other G7 country (Institute for Fiscal Studies 2019). Corbyn’s UK would be the land of the free. Free broadband, university tuition, prescriptions and TV licences for the elderly were all part of the prospectus.

The Conservatives’ own offering, at a mere 64 pages, was more minimalist but did contain expensive promises on the NHS, to diminish Labour’s seemingly permanent advantage on this territory and see off the ritual allegations of being pro-privatisation. The Conservatives’ proposals almost matched those offered by Labour, the pledge of a 3.4% health spending increase bettering even the 3% extra NHS spending offered by Labour in its fabled ‘longest suicide note in history’ 1983 manifesto. Johnson declared the NHS his number one priority, in the immediate aftermath of the election. The veracity of this claim was tested within three months, as the nation was engulfed by a pandemic. Schools and infrastructure accounted for other planned expenditure increases, framed by Johnson as core elements of his ‘levelling-up’ agenda, but were accompanied by promises not to raise the rates of income tax or VAT (Conservative Party, 2019). Asked ‘which political party would be the best at handling the economy?’ voters consistently preferred the Conservatives throughout the campaign, the lead never less than 15%, with Labour favoured by only one-in-four respondents (YouGov, 2020).

Yet many economic aspects of Corbynism involving a greater role for the state were popular. YouGov (2019a) reported majority support for the following policies: increasing income tax for those earning more than £80,000 per year (60%); nationalising the railways (56%) and wealth taxes (53%) whilst far more electors favoured nationalising the water, gas and electricity companies than opposed the idea. Whilst Corbyn’s post-assertion claim that Labour had ‘won the arguments’ was understandably widely derided amid the party’s crushing defeat, the contention was perhaps not as absurd as it first appeared. The Conservatives had clearly learnt lessons from the 2017 election, when Labour’s promise to end austerity had helped it win over voters who no longer wanted to be told there was ‘no magic money tree’. By 2019, the Conservatives had declared that austerity was over and promises of higher spending on the NHS, schools, infrastructure and policing were central to Johnson’s promise to ‘unleash Britain’s potential’. Nonetheless, the sharp contrast between how the electorate responded to the 2017 and 2019 Labour manifestos is telling. The inescapable conclusion is that, whilst the electorate stood to the left of Johnson’s Conservatives economically, there was an abject lack of faith in the capability or competence of a Corbyn administration to deliver its promised mixture of effective state control and redistribution.

**The future**

The Conservative Party won its biggest overall majority since the 102-seat one enjoyed by Margaret Thatcher in 1987. The party won a higher share of the vote than did Tony Blair in the fabled 1997 Labour landslide. Given that 2019 saw the Conservatives increase their share of the vote for the sixth consecutive election, to the highest level since 1983, in securing an overall majority of 80 seats, it amounted to a remarkable victory even allowing for the obvious weaknesses of the opposition. Whilst Labour’s bastions in the largest English and Welsh cities remained intact (a metropolitan left more socially liberal, less concerned with immigration and slightly pro-Remain) there was scant comfort beyond. Every English region and Wales saw a sizeable swing from Labour to the Conservatives.

The Conservatives won a fourth consecutive term with little promise of the fiscal discipline that had characterised their return to power nearly a decade earlier. The new government intended to invest – aka borrow – “£100 billion for infrastructure projects” (Conservative Party 2019: 27). There was much talk of increased spending to reward those poorer northern areas which had eschewed Corbyn’s Labour and lent their support to Boris Johnson’s party. What to do about these newly Conservative constituencies exercised the initial thoughts of the government before any lingering financial reserve evaporated amid the stringencies of the Covid-19 virus emergency.

Even if the biggest peacetime crisis in anyone’s memory subsides at some point – and there is absolutely no guarantee at the time of writing - the Conservative government will evidently no longer have the fiscal room for manoeuvre that might have allowed the financial targeting of northern areas with transport and connectivity infrastructure projects. Concurrently, there will be little money to address perhaps the biggest issue avoided by successive governments; that of social care. The ‘dementia tax’ criticism aimed at Theresa May, when she (briefly) tried to tackle the issue at the 2017 election, warned her successor off the territory. The lack of financial scope for investment may yet prove problematic because the essence of support for the Conservatives was conditional and based on push and pull factors. It was partly a reward for Conservative clarity on Brexit and respect for the Leave vote and also amounted to a clear repudiation of Corbyn as Labour leader but was not necessarily an outright rejection of all economic aspects of Corbynism. The new Conservative voters may desire economic redistribution in their favour. They were also concerned with cultural ‘security’. A Conservative programme fusing Brexit and greater control of immigration with the promise of economic rewards held appeal to voters in northern towns for whom the process of detachment from support for Labour had been a long-term event. As Matthew Flinders’ contribution noted in his contribution, the 2019 election result was partly the outworking of long-term political trends. Brexit may have been the catalyst but did not commence such trends.

Retention of the 2019 ‘new Conservatives’ is far from assured however and it is worth remembering that only 5,000 votes separate the Conservatives from Labour in the ten most marginal seats. With Keir Starmer elected as a more feasible Prime Minister-in-waiting. Labour’s prospects are less bleak than during the Corbyn years. Four consecutive defeats may concentrate Labour minds, as they did after the 1979-92 wilderness years. The formation of a shadow cabinet which looks like a government in waiting, allied to fiscal responsibility, should see Labour’s poll ratings improve. The rejection of Corbyn was not a rejection of many of the economic aspects of Corbynite socialism, so there is scope for Starmer to remain radical. The sums ploughed into the Conservative government’s furlough scheme to protect workers during the Covid-19 crisis made Corbyn’s economic proposals look models of fiscal rectitude in comparison. The age of fiscal rules has passed. When this is added to the apparent diminished salience of Brexit, it is perhaps less a case of Starmer having to force his party to compromise with the electorate and more a need to present to voters a credible team that appears capable of achieving governing competence. That said, it may be difficult to conceive how Starmer – pro-EU, pro-free movement of labour, socially liberal and southern – might resonate with the cultural conservatism that characterises sections of Labour’s northern working-class support. The permanence of the desertion of Labour is now conditional primarily upon Conservative performance. Labour’s support among the middle-class is of sufficiently long-standing that it is unlikely to disappear. The recovery of a section of working-class voters provides the key to election victory. Those voters have peeled away over several elections, ever since the heyday of the Blairite cross-class coalition. Some deserted Labour for UKIP in 2015 before supporting the Conservatives.

It is folly to overthink along class lines these days given that, as a modern voting variable, it is the mere embellishment and detail that was once Pulzer’s (1967) everything. It is finally, belatedly, time to give the Alford Index[[1]](#footnote-1) - on death row for so long - a quiet burial. It is also time to stop thinking of the working-class as comprising mainly traditional male manual workers, given that a much larger section comprises service employees, many of them women working in low security delivery, call centre or cleaning jobs (as examples). This working-class, which is also ethnically diverse, may be bereft of the fixed party loyalties of old. Whilst working-class conservatism is hardly new, the age when it was regarded as somehow deviant has long passed. The Conservatives led comfortably in 2019 among the working-class and middle-class but the advantage is not secured.

In terms of modern variables, age is what matters most. Labour’s best hope is to avert the generational effect where voters flip to the Conservatives as they mature in years. Sarah Harrison’s contribution shows that 58% of first-time voters and 62% of young (18 to 24-year-old) voters supported Labour in the election but only 30% of those aged 30 and over made a similar choice. Even that stark age variable brought less comfort for Labour than at the previous contest. Whereas in 2017 the crossover age at which a voter was more likely to vote Conservative than Labour was 47, this fell sharply to 39 in 2019, with almost two-thirds of those aged 65+ voting Conservative (YouGov 2019b). It appeared that the ‘young middle-aged’, aged 35-54 were most prepared to switch from Labour to the Conservatives (Ipsos MORI, 2019).

If the bark of social class has been quietening for a long while, it is not the only variable on mute. Gender as a voting determinant seems perpetually so. As Emily Harmer and Rosalynd Southern noted, there was (again) only a small aggregate gender gap, with 42% of women voting Conservative compared to 44% of men and 34% of women voting Labour compared to 31% of men. The significance of the 2019 election lay in other gendered aspects. For the first time a majority of Labour MPs are female but the party’s post-election change of leader made it 21 from 21 successes for a male candidate.

Some of the Conservative government’s problems lie north of their new unlikely midlands and northern England heartlands. Assuming replication in the Scottish Parliament elections, the SNP’s advancement of its position will maintain pressure from the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, upon Boris Johnson for a Section Three order, transferring the power for a second independence referendum to Holyrood, ending its reserved status under the Scotland Act. Such a transfer will be resisted and conceivably never conceded, but this will be tricky politics if the SNP tide refuses to go out. The disjuncture between Conservative and SNP positions – and, naturally, their supporters – on defining questions is obviously acute. The Scottish Election Study data cited by James Mitchell and Ailsa Henderson showed this starkly. The Conservatives polled at a mere 1% amongst those electors who support Scottish independence and EU membership (remarkably, the SNP managed to win almost one in ten of those opposed to both independence and EU membership). Whilst the Conservatives can seek solace in the far more abject performance of Scottish Labour, that alone does not resolve anything. Meanwhile, an older constitutional question has not disappeared. In Northern Ireland, the power to call a border poll lies with its Secretary of State, required to hold one under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement if a majority for a united Ireland appears likely. Although constitutional issues will always be to the fore, it seems most unlikely that the current government would initiate such a poll.

In closing, for Labour to win an overall majority at the next election would be remarkable but not impossible. A 100-seat Conservative majority in 1959 was overturned by Labour, under a new leader of a reinvigorated party, by 1964. Starmer needs to emulate Harold Wilson. There is much uncertainty over the political fallout from the Covid-19 virus crisis, with normal political rules suspended – although that was also largely the case during the Brexit saga. A hung parliament, with Labour cutting a deal with other parties, is the minimum Labour aspiration and an indecisive result is highly possible, based on John Curtice’s analysis in this volume. As he notes, despite the changes in the geography of party support in 2019, there are still too few seats that are marginal between Labour and the Conservatives for the system to exaggerate the lead of the largest party over the second party to the extent once seen. This, plus the sizeable chunk of other parties in the House of Commons (the SNP will not disappear anytime soon; ditto the Northern Ireland parties) means that a hung parliament is a live prospect. Given that editions of *Britain Votes* have appeared at two-year intervals in recent years, our self-indulgent - entirely apolitical editorial aspiration – may be that the next dramatic contest might not come until 2024.

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1. The Alford Index was commonly used to measure social class when class was the dominant explanation of how Britain voted. It was a crude measure by which the proportion of Labour’s support among the middle-class was deducted from the proportion of the middle-class voting Labour. There were large differentials from the 1940s until the 1970s, when Labour regularly attracted two-thirds of the working-class vote but only around 1/5th of the middle-class vote. The measure has long been criticised for its limited methodological and practical utility, a relic of a long-departed era of two-party class-based politics. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)